



Adhering to Patient Safety Standards: A Healthcare Imperative for the 21st Century

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Abstract

The ethics of healthcare processes aim to protect patient safety by emphasizing the importance of adhering to rules and avoiding harmful practices. They also suggest practical solutions to prevent such failures. Non-compliance, whether due to human error or technical failure, can result in operational failures and pose severe hazards to patients, healthcare workers, and hospital facilities.

This paper discusses intentional non-compliance with healthcare standards and guidelines, referred to as deviation, and demonstrates how adhering to these rules can reduce the risk of harm. Non-compliance can have severe consequences, as it may reveal an organization's fail-safe mechanisms, defenses, or safety nets, potentially resulting in catastrophic events and causing significant harm. These errors typically occur when active errors combine with latent errors, such as flaws or vulnerabilities in a system's defenses. This habit allows the latter to overcome the defenses, gain patient access, and cause harm. There is no such thing as a completely safe environment, even the most advanced ones.

Additionally, all humans, regardless of their intelligence, have weaknesses. In healthcare processes, every signal has the potential to cause harm, leading to tragic outcomes or even death. The factors contributing to non-compliance fall under individual, collective, organizational, or sociocultural categories. Reducing non-compliance in healthcare processes and ensuring patient safety requires all stakeholders to commit to patient safety ethics.

Introduction

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, compliance is following laws or regulations, especially those that apply to a particular industry or type of employment. Compliance in the healthcare process refers to various practices that comply with internal and external regulations. The primary objective of healthcare compliance is to ensure patient safety, maintain the confidentiality of patient data, and ensure accurate billing practices. Failing to comply with healthcare delivery standards presents a problem with substantial consequences, such as medical errors, patient injury, and increased healthcare costs.

Patients often face significant risks from long-term exposure to hazards when healthcare professionals fail to follow regulations and procedures at different levels of responsibility. Thus, it is imperative to identify the root cause to recommend appropriate remedial measures for the patient's benefit.

Identifying the factors contributing to non-compliance among patients and healthcare providers is crucial. Patient-centered, therapy-related, social and economic, healthcare system, and disease factors contribute to non-

compliance. These factors necessitate more scrutiny and intervention [1].

Non-compliance with laws is a significant obstacle to implementing policies promoting universal Healthcare. Estimates for therapeutic non-compliance vary widely, ranging from 15% to 93%, with a global average of 50% [2].

Health professionals are ethically obligated to prioritize the well-being of their patients and avoid causing harm. Despite this, some healthcare practices that may be deemed irregular are still utilized by professionals, who often justify their use while minimizing potential risks to the patient. A cross-sectional study conducted in northern Ethiopia has shown that only 43% of healthcare professionals adhered to recommended precautions [3].

Human fallibility and various factors contribute to medical errors that require constant attention and acknowledgment. Non-compliance refers to a deliberate violation of rules and protocols established by international, national, or local healthcare organizations.

Research conducted in Tanzania shows that only 8% of healthcare staff followed standard infection prevention and control guidelines their compliance with the proper handling of

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spills needed to be improved. In contrast, only 34% of healthcare staff complied with the policy not to reuse disposable masks in 2021 [4].

Healthcare delivery and outcomes can vary, and assessing compliance requires gathering data through various methods. Deviations from care standards are common within health institutions, and repeated violations can normalize into acceptable routines. This paper explores the normalization of these deviations and identifies contributing factors, known as "deviations," to demonstrate how compliance can reduce the risk of harm and improve healthcare delivery.

Deviating practices in the healthcare sector

Deviating practices in healthcare involve actions and decisions that don't adhere to standard protocols or guidelines, often due to resource limitations, individual preferences, or systemic challenges [5]. These deviations should be distinguished from mistakes made by health professionals during their daily work. Globally, many healthcare workers deviate from standard infection control practices, including abbreviations, gloves not changing, safety checks skipped, gowning, and not properly washing or sanitizing hands. These deviations can lead to serious health risks and require immediate action.

The non-compliance of regulations among experienced workers and their influence on new colleagues is becoming more prevalent in the workplace, including the healthcare system.

A study conducted in southwestern Ethiopia revealed that health workers with less than five years of experience are likelier to adhere to standard safety measures than those with more than five years of experience [6].

Numerous factors contribute to the normalization of atypical practices in the healthcare system, but it is critical to note that these practices are not intended to harm patients intentionally. Health practitioners defend them as necessary for the patient's welfare and recovery.

Deviant practices are perceived based on three behavioral dimensions: institutionalization, socialization, and rationalization [7]. The institutionalization of healthcare practices encourages newcomers to adopt them actively, as exemplified by the Congolese proverb, "When you get to a place where people are dancing with their right foot, dance to the same rhythm." It emphasizes the importance of socialization in healthcare, where professionals must work collaboratively to foster harmony and benefit from the support of their peers. Healthcare professionals must take cues from their colleagues to achieve the best possible outcomes, even if they may potentially violate regulations. It aligns with the concept of rationalizing deviant practices. Some argue that it is acceptable to deviate from established rules, as they may need to fully understand the unique circumstances of patients, healthcare professionals, and the healthcare environment. The healthcare institution may argue that strict conformity to rules could hinder achieving productivity goals, requiring improvement of standards.

The Association for the Advancement of Medical Instrumentation (AAMI) and the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) jointly established the US standard for protective apparel utilized in healthcare facilities, such as surgical gowns, which gauges liquid barrier performance via standardized testing methods. The system classifies these garments into four levels - 1, 2, 3, and 4 - according to the risk level they address, ranging from minimal to high [8].

It is evident that implementing these regulations, although

advantageous in maintaining the safety of healthcare personnel and patients during the healthcare delivery process, would not be feasible for healthcare facilities in low-income or poor countries.

Non-compliance can occur if the system operator lacks an adequate understanding of the rule or needs to receive sufficient information on its meaning and application. Additionally, confusion may arise from health professionals' egos, preventing them from admitting their lack of knowledge in understanding and applying established rules. Poor decision-making resulting from inaccurate or incomplete information can lead to adverse health outcomes. Individuals unaware of the correct safety protocols for managing hazardous materials may unintentionally place themselves or others in danger of exposure to harmful substances [9].

Healthcare organizations use policies and guidelines to improve productivity, safety, and care efficiency by standardizing procedures. However, researchers are concerned about potential latent errors and compliance issues if not addressed promptly. Innovative resources can disrupt workflow, but adhering to guidelines can be challenging due to information overload. New technologies can lead to catastrophic failures, so it is crucial to consider the risks and drawbacks of implementing them. Laparoscopic surgery aims to reduce hospitalization time and scarring while promoting faster recovery, but it also exposes patients to significant handling risks.

Positive deviance in healthcare refers to deliberate actions that deviate from set norms, incorporating originality, resourcefulness, flexibility, or a combination of these attributes. Nurses may need to use their professional judgment to meet patient needs, but strict policies and fear of license loss prevent them from reporting their exact care, resulting in a lack of outcome data. A reliable method for nurses to safely report deviations made for patients' benefit is essential.

Accurately reporting and documenting nursing care is essential for obtaining precise data on outcomes and promoting patient safety [10].

In specific organizations, system operators, particularly those with more experience, may occasionally disregard rules and view them as unnecessary. They may rationalize their noncompliant behavior as if it were inconsequential. Despite the awareness that their conduct or regimen conflicts with established protocol, they are confident they are acting correctly. It is common for individuals only to recognize the hidden risks to themselves and their surroundings when faced with a catastrophe. Managing these situations requires capable leadership from authorized figures to enforce safety measures that safeguard all individuals.

When employees hesitate to voice their opinions, it can harm patient safety. A study in the International Journal of Mental Health Systems found that hesitation to communicate can lead to poor collaboration among healthcare professionals, risking medical errors and adverse patient outcomes [11].

Witnesses of aberrant behaviors may come to accept them out of fear, retaliation, or hostility from the perpetrator, either for personal reasons or from reluctance to report the misconduct to the appropriate authorities. Healthcare professionals may be hesitant to discuss their concerns about patient safety due to the fear of creating conflict within the healthcare team. Healthcare workers may be more willing to speak up and communicate if they believe their concerns are being heard, potentially strengthening communication in healthcare.

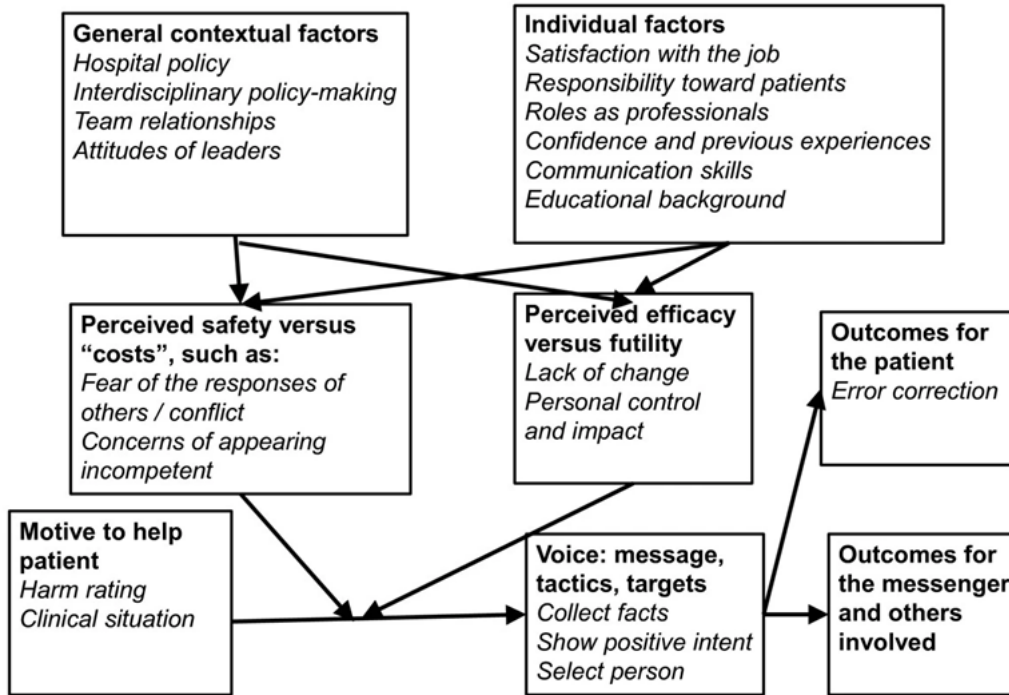


Figure 1. Model of Healthcare Professionals' Speaking Up [11].

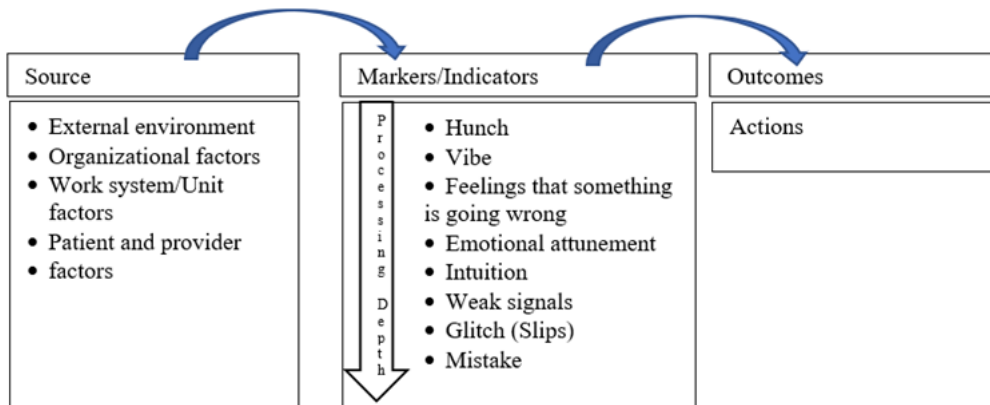


Figure 2. A proposed framework for the investigation of weak signals for safety behaviors [13].

Communication challenges in healthcare can highlight four perspectives: individual, team, organizational, and sociocultural. Individual perspectives emphasize patient safety and collaboration, while team perspectives emphasize maintaining a positive team dynamic and respecting mentors. Organizational considerations include administrative guidelines and support, while sociocultural differences and hierarchy can impact behavior. Reporting misconduct by a senior physician can be challenging for new doctors, especially in a multidisciplinary healthcare setting [12].

As care unit managers ascend to higher positions, the significance of rule violations diminishes. They may distort information or fail to share it, risking productivity loss. Hospital administrators often face challenges when disciplining

individual dentists, which can result in repeated misconduct and breaches of protocol. Enforcing rules with the dentist could create more problems for the department, as it could jeopardize patient safety.

Recommendations

Leadership is crucial in preventing the normalization of deviance in healthcare systems. System operators must be committed to patient safety, bridging the gap between theory and practice. Effective teamwork and fostering open communication, situational awareness, and continuous learning are essential. Prioritizing patient well-being over individual team members' interests is crucial. Leaders can promote commitment by establishing a model and cultivating an administrative climate that minimizes breaches of principles.

System operators should learn to recognize and report weak signals, avoiding overly optimistic responses. Accurately identifying the source of misconduct signals and evaluating their importance is essential. Emotionally sensitive conversations and ongoing rule compliance monitoring are essential.

The healthcare industry constantly evolves, with new technologies, resource availability fluctuations, and qualitative variances driving change. Healthcare managers must be proactive in ensuring adherence to established procedures and regulations. Health system leadership should objectively evaluate the severity of adverse incidents and avoid excessive hope. Effective correction of deviant practices depends on practical communication tools and knowledge. Clear guidelines and policies should demonstrate dedication to staff safety and well-being. A no-blame approach is necessary in handling system errors and flaws.

Conclusion

Regulations and guidelines are in place to guarantee safe care delivery for both healthcare professionals and patients. They are not complying with regulations, whether due to human error or technical malfunctions, which can result in operational breakdowns and pose significant risks to patients and hospital environments. All system operators are obligated to comply with these rules. Although specific circumstances may explain the system operators' non-compliance with these regulations, they must adhere to the guidelines. Circumstances leading to non-compliance may be individual, collective, organizational, or sociocultural. Reducing non-compliance in healthcare processes and ensuring patient safety requires all stakeholders to commit to patient safety ethics.

Conflicts of Interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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